

optimal situation and in order to fill these gaps, selection criteria must be able to contain a condition that allows a promotional message to be displayed if no other one is. Extending this process to allow multiple "background" activities is possible if each background campaign is assigned a priority. If two background campaigns are selected for a household, the one with highest priority will be shown. It is likely that higher priority campaigns cost more.

SCREEN ALLOCATION STRATEGY

There are no unused areas of the television screen that can be used for the promotional messages according to the invention. Even without the change from 4:3 to 16:9 format screens, there are many different picture formats used for movies and videos. The number of combinations is large and state of the art television sets also have the ability to resize the screen both vertically and horizontally to allow the user to use the entire screen for the picture. The invention therefore provides the promotional message on top of the television broadcast in a portion of the screen as shown in Figure 1, thus hiding or replacing a portion of the broadcast with the message during fractions of time.

In the preferred embodiment shown in Figure 2 and according to the present invention the promotional message is shown as a banner 8, 9 close to the screen border. The banners 8, 9 are located at the upper and left borders of the screen, respectively, since those areas seem to contain the least information. In the lower parts, the text strips normally appear, and in the top right corner the broadcast channel information is shown, which makes these two borders less useful. The banners 8, 9 are shown as thin rectangular stripes, Nevertheless, if so desired said banner 8, 9 can be expanded to any suitable size and shape and/or be located at any suitable location within the screen.

The information channel consequently is always available independent of which television channel a consumer/viewer has selected. In addition and as shown in Figure 2, the new information channel requires only a small amount of the television screen to be allocated during short intervals for the promotional messages to be shown in an optimal way.

INTERACTION

According to a particular feature of the present invention there are provided pre-allocated interaction buttons 10, 11, 12 within the promotional message. In the preferred embodiment these interaction buttons are shown to be located in the corners of the television screen but, of course, these interaction buttons 10, 11, 12 can be placed anywhere on the screen. Their usage is modal e.g. their usage depends on the needs from the banners. From an esthetical point of view, the banners 8, 9 including the interaction buttons 10, 11, 12 could cover the entire border. The upper banner 8 contains the promotional message of the present campaign. The left banner 9 is allocated for services requested by the user, e.g. scheduled alerts. The upper interaction buttons 10, 11 are allocated for the promotional message, and the lower 12 for usage related to user requested services.

The user interacts with the TV set-top box application by using a standard remote control, with enhanced functionality to also control a cursor on the TV screen.

The interaction with the interaction buttons 10, 11, 12 is monitored by the system, preferably by the set-top box 6, and stored centrally for statistical purposes and for analysis of the outcome of a campaign. Preferably, the promotional message is removed from the screen when any of the buttons is selected. The number of buttons, what actions they are supposed to carry out etc. is defined at campaign set up. In a preferred embodiment one of the upper interaction buttons 10, 11 can be used for a "more" or "order" request and the other 10, 11 for a "quit" request. The number of "order" button clicks then reflects the success of the campaign, i.e. the number of consumers/viewers that have actually interacted with the promotional message. The consumer responses are collected for each campaign, and a campaign report is generated.

Normally the button is a link to a Web page. The button itself is however not displayed under the control of any browser. Instead, a promo application has control of the buttons, and can therefore collect the user responses on the campaign. When defining the campaign, the link to the Web page is defined. When

selected, the control of the television screen is handed over to some browser, that is a part of the set-top box standard functionality.

The sum of "order" and "quit" gives the least number of television receivers at which a particular promotional message actually has been watched by a consumer/viewer. If a consumer/viewer interacts with a promotional message, a verified hit has occurred. Otherwise, if the television is on but the user did not act on it, a non-verified hit has occurred.

It is preferable to keep the number of promotional messages at a reasonably low level since the used portion and the frequency of messages are a trade off between consumer expectations and business needs.

SPECIAL FEATURES

In accordance with the present invention a launch panel can be brought up on the television screen by e.g. a button on the set-top box's remote control. The launch panel is mainly a menu of applications that it is possible to execute. The launch panel can be a part of the standard application in the set-top box, with added functionality according to the invention for interaction with the promotional messages. The add-ins provided by the present invention can comprise management of consumer profiles, starting a web browser, downloading electronic coupons, retrieval of promotional messages, management of user defined services, such as alerts.

The features of the web browser available from the launch panel are defined by the browser application. The history of visited pages can be stored in a history list. A cache of pages can be stored locally in the set-top box. This can be administered by the browser application, which can be a part of the standard feature set in the set-top box. Each shown promotional message may be stored locally, and may be recalled from the launch panel. In addition, subcategories as well as overview of the promotional messages can be made available and promotional messages involving coupons can be re-run. The viewer can request the system to survey coupons during non-watching hours. They can be retrieved later from the history. This feature will increase the incitement for the consumer to use the consumer profile